PROSPECT; *or, View of the Moral World.*

SATURDAY, *December* 2, 1804. No. 52.

TO THE
SUBSCRIBERS FOR THE PROSPECT.

THIS Number compleats the firſt year of the Proſpect, or View of the Moral World. We return our ſincere thanks to thoſe who have patronized and encouraged a work of this kind; their individual exertions to promote the cauſe of moral truth, it is confidently hoped will meet a juſt reward in the ſcientific reſuscitation of future ages. The nature of moral truth requires that its progreſs be ſlow; but if ſlow, it is rendered certain, when not impeded by external force. The intellectual character of man enlarges the ſphere of human confidence and gives to a dubious anxiety that ſtrength and courage which the local predicaments of human aſſociations cannot furniſh. The former is immortal and defies the ſucceſſive ravages of time; while the latter is temporary, and ſubjected to diſſipation by the incalculable force of a thouſand different cauſes. The philoſopher and the philanthropiſt ſhould march with a firm and ſteady ſtep, and develope all their energies in the accompliſhment of the moſt important object,—that of rendering ſcientific, virtuous and happy the great maſs of their fellow beings. A reſult ſo important muſt be accompliſhed by a combination of individual efforts; we chearfully throw our mite into the general ſcale and for the purpoſe of accelerating the cauſe of moral truth ſhall continue this periodical publication with renewed confidence of its ſucceſs; eſpecially as we have been aſſured by many of our literary friends, that they will not be deficient in furniſhing collateral aid for the promotion of a cauſe ſo intereſting and important.

It is the intention of the Editor to keep each years Proſpect as ſeparate and different as poſſible, ſo far as the nature of the matter and the utility of the publicati-

on will poſſibly warrant. It is an injury to the cauſe of truth, and eſpecially to a moral periodical work, to preſume upon a connection which has no exiſtance. Truth is inherent in the nature of things and it is not neceſſary for any one to know what a man thought laſt year in order to decide upon the truth or correctneſs of his preſent reflections. We ſhall publiſh the firſt number of the Proſpect, for the year eighteen hundred and five, on the firſt Saturday of January next; this will leave a ſmall chaſm between the firſt and ſecond years publication; but this upon the propoſed plan can produce no poſſible injury. It may, perhaps be objected that the chain of our comments upon the ſacred writing of the Jews and Chriſtians will be broken; this would ſallow of courſe upon any plan, on account of the incoherence of the matters contained in the bible itſelf. It would be juſt as well to begin at revelation, and read and comment backward, as to begin at Geneſis and proceed forward. There is no connection in the book, either as to principle or fact, and whoever has examined it with an unprejudiced eye, will recognize the truth of this obſervation. Comments therefore, of the ſecond year are perfectly diſtinct from thoſe of the firſt, and all the other principles advanced will reſt upon the baſis of their own merit, without any ſpecial anterior relationſhip of any kind whatever.

TO THE EMPEROR OF CHINA.

AUGUST SIRE,

On the other hand, we ſuppoſe a rich, or noble, Chriſtian, a profeſſed diſciple of the meek and lowly Jeſus, to have half a dozen children: he has much more than is neceſſary amply to ſupply all his real wants by an equal diviſion of his property among them, but they cannot of courſe be ſo rich individually as himſelf, or make the ſame parade after his death, or as if he had but one son and heir: this reflection mortifies his pride, from the idea that it will leſſen the influence and conſequence of his

name and family among his neighbours. What is to be done in ſuch a caſe? His religion provides a ſalve for every ſore, as well for the gratification as the humiliation of inordinate pride; therefore, after having nouriſhed, cheriſhed, and fondly reared all his children to adult age, made them his companions and friends, and given them a taſte and high reliſh for the pleaſures of ſociety —he ſolicits, and his religion provides, the tombs in in which to bury five of his children alive, ſolely to gratify his vanity iu ſwelling the fortune of his eldeſt ſon: from this execrable motive, he thuſts the innocent injured victins into lonely, gloomy, ſeparate cells, there to linger out a long, long, tedious, cheerleſs, uſeleſs, fruitleſs, ſolitary, painful life, in the privation of every enjoyment ordained by Heaven to make life ſupportable; and for their comfort they are told they are married to Jeſus. Yet will this ſame Chriſtian exclaim---O, the barbarous Pagan!—Such is the Chriſtian mode of reaſoning, and thus are the are ignorant amuſed if not abuſed.

I cannot ſuppoſe that mothers in Aſia have leſs natural affection for their children than thoſe in Europe. I believe that human nature is the ſame every where, but that peculiar circumſtances, ſituations, cuſtoms, and prejudices may weaken, and ſometimes overcome, natural ties. Thus, among Chriſtians, we hear of mothers deſtroying their new-born infants, not for want of tenderneſs, or ſenſibility, but probably from an exceſs of the latter, and a conſequent preportionate dread of public ſhame and diſgrace; for, had the ſame children been born in wedlock, it is more than probable that thoſe ſame mothers would have been the moſt fond and doting. But as the Chineſe mothers are actuated by a different motive, it is to be preſumed they would long ere this day have been relieved from the cruel neceſſity of deſtroying their ſupernumerary children, had it been the fate of China to be ſo ſituated, or expoſed, as to have been forced to receive frequent viſits from the European powers.

But, notwithſtanding the dreadful conflict which muſt neceſſarily rage in the breaſt of a mother before ſhe can

reſolve on the extinction of her offspring; urged on one ſide by the dread of the certain infamy to the woman who ſhould be known to have produced a natural or illegitimate child, and reſtrained on the other ſide by natural affection, and the great danger and fatal conſequences of detection; yet the Chriſtian laws rigorouſly ordain that the poor unhappy deſponding mother, who ſhall be convicted of ſuch an act, ſhall ſuffer an ignominious death, (may Heaven ever preſerve me from being in any way inſtrumental in ſuch a verdict!) while the man before mentioned, who deſtroys his thouſands in a day, is extolled as a hero, or a God; the act is appauded as highly meritorious, and largely recompenſed with riches and honours.—This once provoked a Chriſtian poet, who is now a biſhop, to exclaim,

"One murder makes a villain,
"Millions a hero—Princes are priviledg'd
"To kill, and numbers ſanctify the crime.
"O! why will kings forget that they are men!
"And men that they are brethren!"

Judging of your Majeſty's talents and virtues from general opinion and report, I have preſumed that only plain truth would be acceptable, and have therefore cautiouſly avoided the ordinary ſtyle of European dedications, which contain little more than fulſom flattery; and as a perſonage of your diſtinguiſhed abilities muſt agree in opinion with the Engliſh Biſhops, that kings are but men, and all men are brethren, whether their origin be founded on the ancient Chineſe, or modern Moſaic chronology; it being in my humble opinion of far leſs conſequence to eſtabliſh the date, or place, of the origin of our firſt Fathers, than to find out if poſſible for what purpoſe we are placed here, and to ſtrive to anſwer the preſumed end of our creation, as rational beings.

With truly cordial and fraternal affection I ſalute your Majeſty; and when theſe my feeble eſſays ſhall be laid

at your feet, I pray you to receive them with brotherly kindneſs and indulgence; and to be pleaſed to recollect, that the Author is a Citizen of a country whoſe laws and conſtitution are as free from religious prejudices as thoſe of China, and the people as little diſpoſed to invade the peace, happineſs, or territory of other nations, either for the purpoſe of poſſeſſion, or converſion, being content with the abundant portion of bleſſings which bounteous Heaven has already laviſhed on them.

E. CHURCH.—AN AMERICAN.

BAPTISM.

Baptiſm, a Greek word, ſignifying immerſion: men being ever led by their ſenſes, eaſily came to fancy that what waſhed the body likewiſe cleanſed the ſoul. In the vaults under the Egyptian temples we large tubs for the abolutions of the prieſts and the initiated. The Indians, from time immemorial, purified themſelves in the Ganges, and the ceremony ſtill ſubſiſts among them.—The Hebrews adopted it, baptizing all proſylites who would not ſubmit to be circumciſed; eſpecially the women, as exempt from that operation, except in Ethiopia only, were baptized; it was as regeneration; it imparted a new ſoul among them, as in Egypt. Concerning this, ſee Epiphanius, Maimonides, and the Gemara.

John baptized in the Jordan; he baptized even Jeſus Chriſt himſelf, who, however, never baptized any one, yet was pleaſed to conſecrate this ancient ceremony. All ſigns are of themſelves indifferent, and God annexes his grace to ſuch as he thinks fit to chooſe. Baptiſm ſoon became the principle rite, and the ſeal of Chriſtianity. The firſt fifteen biſhops of Jeruſalem were all circumciſed, and there is no certainty of their having ever been baptized.

In the firſt ages of Chriſtianaty, this ſacrament was abuſed, nothing being more common than to delay baptiſm till the agony of death; of this the Emperor Conſtantine is no ſlight proof. This was his way of reaſoning: Baptiſm waſhes away all ſin, ſo that I may kill my wife, my ſon, and all my relations, then I'll get myſelf baptiſed, and ſo go to Heaven; and he acted accordingly. Such an inſtance carried danger with it, and, by degrees, the cuſtom of delaying the ſacred laver till death, wore off.

The Greeks always adhered to bapiſm by immerſion; but the Latins, towards the end of the eight century, having extended their religion over Gaul and Germany, and ſeeing that immerſion in cold countries did not agree with children, ſubſtituted in its ſtead aſperſion, or ſprinkling, for which they were often anathematized by the Greek church.

St. Cyprian, biſhop of Carthage, being aſked whether they, whoſe body had been only ſprinkled, were really baptiſed; he anſweres, in his 70th letter, that ſeveral churches did not hold them to be Chriſtians; that he does, but withal, what grace they have, is infinitely leſs than that of thoſe who, according to the primitive rite, had been dipped three times.

After immerſion a Chriſtian became initiated; whereas before he was only a catechumen; but initiation requited ſecurities and ſponſors, who were called by a name anſwerable to that of godfathers, that the church might be ſure of the fidelity of the new Chriſtians, and the ſacred myſteries be not divulged. Wherefore during the firſt centuries, the Pagans in general, knew as little of the Chriſtian myſteries, as the Chriſtians did of the myſteries of Iſis and Eleuſis.

Cyril of Alexandria, in a writing of his againſt the Emperor Julian, delivers himſelf thus: "I would ſpeak a word of baptiſm, did I not fear, that what I ſay might come to theſe who are not initiated."

Children were baptized ſo early as the ſecond century, it being, indeed, very natural that Chriſtians ſhould be

ſolicitous for this ſacrament to be adminiſtered to their children, as without it they would be damned; and, at length, it was concluded that the time of adminiſtration ſhould be at the end of eight days, in imitation of the Jews adminiſtering circumciſion. The Greek church ſtill retains this cuſtom: However, in the third century, the cuſtom prevailed of not being baptized till near death.

SUPERSTITIOUS CREDULITY IN CASES OF MURDER.

An opinion has prevailed for many ages, that if the real murderer of a perſon were to touch the dead body, ſupernatural proofs of guilt would immediately appear by the iſſuing of blood from the deceaſed. This opinion is expoſed to the moſt inſurmountable objections, and ought never to be received in any caſe whatever. In September laſt a boy was murdered in the city of Baltimore, and a neighbouring boy was ſuſpected to be the perpetrator of this horrid act. Recourſe was had to the ancient ordeal of blood; appeal was made to ſupernatural power to decide the important queſtion of guilt or innocence. The account which has been publiſhed in the newſpapers ſtates, that the experiment terminated in a popular demonſtration of guilt againſt the ſuſpected boy. He placed his hand upon the wound, and freſh blood is ſaid to have iſſued; other perſons are ſaid to have done the ſame but without producing the ſame effect. Hence credulity becomes confirmed and rivited in the errors of antiquity. It is impoſſible in the nature of the caſe that any ſuch evidences of guilt ſhould appear; The circulations had ſtopped and nothing ſhort of a miracle could have revived their action ſo as to diſcriminate between the real murderer and thoſe who were innocent. If it is preſumed that God would interpoſe in ſuch a caſe, why not make the dead body ſpeak at one and delare in an audible voice, that's the man who murdered me. This would place the matter beyond doubt, and would be a very important miracle worth working. But it will

† See Works of the Learned V. 2. VI. p. 152.

be ſaid that the iſſuing of blood is equally convincing; this is not the fact. In the firſt place no blood ever iſſued from a dead body upon the ſimple touch of the fingers, unleſs the preſsure was made upon the place previouſly wounded; in ſuch caſe there might be a diſcharge of blood or ſomething like it. If it ſhould be asked why this ſhould happen from the touch of one perſon and not from another, the anſwer is, that guilt or even the ſuſpicion of guilt gives to the hand a tremulous agitation which does not exiſt in the hand of unſuſpected innocence. This circumſtance of itſelf might cauſe ſomething like blood to iſsue from the wound; but ſuch a fact ought not to be admitted as evidence of guilt. Perhaps the ſame manner of laying on the hand and the ſame degree of preſsure from another perſon would produce the ſame effect. In ſome caſes all the hands of guilt and innocence would produce no effect at all; in others only for a few times, and in others peculiar poſitions, and circumſtances not immediately under the eye of the ſpectators might decide the eternal deſtiny of an innocent man. So long as ſociety will liſten to this kind of evidence there will be no poſitive ſafety for virtue, and the moſt accompliſhed villian will ſometimes go unpuniſhed. We had better go back at once to the age of chivalry—Fire and water ordeals, and to all the nonſenſe of antiquity.

FINIS.

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